

MUTILATION OF NCERT TEXTBOOKS

Peddling Saffron Narrative

By Abhay Kumar

By deleting lines, paragraphs and chapters from NCERT textbooks and the Delhi University syllabus, the academic institutions working under the Central Government have attempted to peddle the Hindutva narrative. Although the ruling establishment has justified these acts and called them necessary measures to reduce the burden on students, the truth is that they are politically motivated acts.

Even a cursory glance at the deleted contents reveals that they have been problematising the communal understanding of politics and history, which the RSS has been long attempting to establish as the only truth. Against the saffronisation of education, voices of the protests have been raised and the mainstream media have never looked at them beyond the establishment's position.

However, Professor Suhas Palshikar and Professor Yogendra Yadav, the chief advisors of the political science book, sent a letter to the NCERT director and called the changes "arbitrary" acts. After Yadav shared the letter on his Twitter handle on Friday, it drew the attention of a few media houses. In their letter, they alleged the NCERT authority of "mutilating" textbooks "beyond recognition" and blamed the authority for acting in a "partisan manner". They were right to argue that such an act by NCERT killed "the spirit of critique and questioning". Lodging their strong protest, they have dissociated themselves from the textbooks.

Under the supervision of Palshikar and Yadav, political science books for high schools and intermediate levels were prepared in 2006-2007. While the books have not been replaced by the current regime, a large share of the contents are now deleted. The fact that the significant changes were made without even consulting the chief advisors is a pointer to the Hindutva forces' political agendas.

It appears that the erasure is a part of the well-thought strategy. The Hin-

dutva game has been able to remove almost all those contents that have long challenged their communal politics. Such deletion is justified in the name of "rationalization of syllabus". In the name of "reducing" curriculum burden to help students achieve "speedy recovery" post-Corona pandemic, the real agenda is to hollow out the textbooks from their progressive contents and to deny the young mind the right to know the ugly face of communalism.

Look at the irony. The Modi Government has not introduced the new textbooks, yet their intellectual sharpness has been blunted. The tinkered textbooks and changed syllabus appear to be alive, yet they seem dead in their effect. These textbooks have bodies, yet they have been reduced to soul-less beings.

Remember that the process of deleting the contents began a couple of years ago. During the outbreak of the corona pandemic in 2020, the media reported that the chapters on secularism, citizenship, nationalism and federalism from NCERT political science books were deleted. Wasn't it a shameful act? While the world was fighting the pandemic, the Modi Government was searching for an "opportunity in crisis". During those critical days, not only the

chapters of textbooks were removed but also anti-people farm laws were imposed on the country. From tampering with the textbooks to enacting anti-labour laws and holding the ground-laying ceremony of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the Modi Government was occupied with fulfilling Sangh's agendas.

But in the recent past, the process of mutilation of textbooks has been fast. Selected contents dealing with Mughal history, Freedom Struggles, social movements, democracy, communalism, regional identity and marginalized groups, have been deleted. The chapters discussing Mughal courts have also been torn off. Lines about Mahatma Gandhi have shamelessly been erased and the name of Maulana Azad, freedom fighter and the first education minister of Independent India, has been dropped without giving any reason.

The list of deleted items continues: a few lines from the political science book that discusses Gujarat Violence been deleted; similarly, the report by the Human Rights Commission on it as well

the in-terest of the elites if they can peddle their narration as the truth. By capturing the educational institutions, the saffron forces have been re-

as then prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's call to the Gujarat government to follow "raj dharma" without discriminating people based on caste and religion, have been removed; the reference to Gandhi being disliked by Hindu extremists and the identity of his assassin Nathuram Godse as a Brahmin have been erased as well. Even the references to ghettoization as a result of anti-Muslim Gujarat violence have been deleted from NCERT sociology books; the chapters on the Mughal Court, Central Islamic Lands, the Cold War, and the era of one party dominance discussing the early phase of the Congress party have been torn off.

While the themes of the deleted contents and disciplines may vary, the unifying thread running through all of them is that these contents have shown students complexities of Indian politics and histories and challenged the Hindutva narrative. The communal forces are fully aware of the fact that they could only protect the interest of the elites if they can peddle their narration as the truth. By capturing the educational institutions, the saffron forces have been re-

lently working to replace secular ideas and the egalitarian values of the Constitution with their partisan ideology based on supremacy of historically dominant castes.

Although, saffron forces' main target may appear to be Muslims, this is not the complete picture. The RSS are not against Muslims but against the majority of Indians who are Dalits, Adivasis, backwards, women, minorities and the poor among the upper castes. While their direct assault appears to be on Indian Muslims, they are also erasing the radical histories of other marginalized communities.

While the chapters on Mughals were being removed, the Hindutva forces deliberately projected the deletion as an act of "nationalizing" history and "removing" contents of the "foreign aggressors" from the curriculum. However, they were least interested to propagate that a poem on Dalit Movement, too, was removed from the political science book and contents dealing with Sikh history have been removed as well. Similarly, when a chapter on poet-philosopher Allama Iqbal was removed from the BA Political Science syllabus of Delhi University, the tinkering in a course on Ambedkar was also planned at the same time.

While the histories of the marginalized communities are being deleted, the Hindutva ideologues are

being promoted as "national icons". For example, the University of Delhi recently passed a proposal to teach a full course on Hindutva ideology V. D. Savarkar, the person who tendered an apology to the British Raj and divided Indians on religious lines during the Freedom Struggle. Savarkar is likely to be taught ahead of the courses on Gandhi and Ambedkar. These developments are a pointer to the fact that Hindutva forces are not just against minorities but also against all the marginalized sections. That is why the fight has to be waged by forging a unity of the oppressed.

Long back philosophers have cautioned that while constructing the past, historians must confront complexities and resist constructing a sanitized version of historical truth. The Hindutva agendas are exactly the opposite of it. Instead of understanding multiple and complex histories of India, the saffron forces are desperate to establish one by erasing all others. Their conception of India is Brahmanical, which goes against the spirit of the Constitution and the interests of the majority of Indians, i.e., Dalits, Backwards, Adivasis, women, minorities and Dravidians.

The mutilation of the textbooks should be a big concern for the nation. Such an act attempts to deny young minds the right to know the truth. Critical thinking is being denied and the young minds are injected with the narrative promoting contempt for marginalized communities and minorities. Such an act goes against pluralism and communal harmony and it tries to identify India with one culture and one religion. It is high time we waged a struggle against the saffronisation of education.

(Dr Abhay Kumar is a Delhi-based journalist. He has taught political science at the NCWEB Centre of Delhi University.)

